

# Maurice Hinchey NEWS

## 26<sup>TH</sup> CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT, NEW YORK

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### HINCHEY SAYS TONGASS RECOMMENDATION IGNORES PUBLIC INTEREST

WASHINGTON - U.S. Representative Maurice Hinchey (NY-26) today sharply criticized the Bush Administration for recommending that none of the roadless portion of Alaska's Tongass National Forest be permanently protected from development. Hinchey's comments came in response to the U.S. Forest Service's release of its Tongass Wilderness Plan.

"The Bush Administration had yet another opportunity to side with the public interest over special interests," said Hinchey. "But it chose to ignore the vast majority of the two million public comments it received on this matter and to give a gift to the timber industry. Then the administration tried to greenwash its plans by proposing the protection a token amount of wilderness in the Chugach National Forest."

Hinchey led the fight to prevent road construction and logging in the nearly 60 million acres of U.S. Forest Service land that is not already available for logging, mining and other kinds of development. In June 1999 he generated a letter that was signed by 168 members of the House of Representatives urging President Clinton to protect roadless areas within the National Forests. He successfully fought for improvements to the Clinton Administration's Roadless Area Conservation Policy, including the immediate protection of the Tongass National Forest. Over two million comments were submitted on the policy, nearly all strongly supporting it and the vast majority specifically citing the need to protect the Tongass.

In July 2001, the Bush Administration rescinded the Clinton plan, saying it would review the policy on a forest-by-forest basis and promising to protect roadless areas. Today, in the first major test of that commitment, the Forest Service recommended the "no action" option for the Tongass, effectively reverting to a 1997 management plan that allows about a quarter of the roadless portion of the forest to be opened to logging and other commercial activities. The administration has also proposed protecting 1.4 million acres of the Chugach National Forest, the second largest national forest after the Tongass. Hinchey has supported a plan that would protect 3.6 million acres of the Chugach.

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"The roadless policy adopted by the Clinton Administration was the result of the most extensive public participation process ever undertaken by the Department of Agriculture," said Hinchey. "At over 600 meetings in every national forest, an unprecedented number of Americans voiced their support for permanently protecting roadless areas. Given the environmental record of the Bush Administration, we should not be surprised that those voices were ignored, but we should still be outraged."

The Forest Service will accept public comments on today's recommendation until mid-August.